



Dedicated to the conservation and improvement of Montana's parks, recreation, trails, rivers and historic sites

Environmental Quality Council Testimony – HJR 32

March 7, 2012

My name is Bob Walker and I am a volunteer and represent *Our Montana and the Montana Recreation and Parks Association*. I also have the pleasure of working as a volunteer with seven specific state park friends' organizations (Lewis & Clark Caverns, Bannack, Travelers Rest, All Nations Pishkun Association, Makoshika, Chief Plenty Coup, Pictograph Caves). We are private citizens asking you, our legislators and citizen council members, to make a basic change in state government that will better serve us, your Montana public. That is to create a separate State Parks, Recreation and Heritage Commission within Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

State parks and recreation programs are primarily for people. Our parks were created to preserve unique natural resource areas and historic and archaeological sites while providing at those sites for public use, recreation and educational experiences. State parks are not wilderness areas nor are they wildlife refuges. They are for people and, in most cases, have strong support from the Montana public.

But now comes the difficulty for state parks and recreation under the current organization – wolves, bison, brucellosis, grizzly bears, large land purchases, fish and wildlife season settings and bag limits. These issues have little or nothing to do with state parks and recreation programs and yet take up the vast majority of the time of the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission! In our view, the FWP Commission does a great job but, given time constraints, their backgrounds and statewide controversy on these very topics, the Commission has little time to invest in parks and recreation programs and issues.

Issues – what issues? State Parks funding, rules and regulations, site development and management options; classification options of state parks which could include parks, recreation areas, heritage areas with differing objectives and management strategies for better public service; State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, State Trails Plan, Five grant programs that annually fund no less than 100 projects statewide, Forest Service and BLM travel plans that have major impacts on travel and recreation; motorized recreation including off-highway vehicle,

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Exhibit 3

UTV and snowmobile; non-motorized recreation throughout Montana and reliable funding for non-motorized trails, etc... Important point – the mission statement of FWP include says, “To provide for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana. I don’t see a statement that says “not including federal lands”!

As stated in the past, we suggest a State Parks, Recreation and Heritage Commission should be created separate and distinct from what would become the Fish and Wildlife Commission. We also recommend that this new commission would still be in Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The mission of FWP is to provide for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana. Aside from the previously mentioned difficulties with fish and game issues, many of the state parks projects involve careful study of the natural resources of an area and the protection and interpretation of those resources. Keeping Parks and Recreation with Fish, Wildlife & Parks is a natural fit but a separate Parks, Recreation and Heritage Commission would better serve Montana’s public!

Some have suggested that State Parks and Recreation should be transferred to the DNRC or Commerce. Parks and recreation has had cooperative working relationships with these departments but the mission of FWP best fits the Parks and Recreation programs. And, of course, the fiscal impacts of moving parks and recreation to one of these other agencies is problematic – across the state staff and office space, and the methods of previously paying for lands and equipment with a mixture of fish and game trust funds and state parks funds would lead to shocking fiscal issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and share our views.